



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## VIII.—LITERARY SYMBOLISM IN FRANCE.

The terms "symbolist" and "décadent" are often considered synonymous. This has its reason for being; the two directions are related not only empirically, but logically. Symbolism calls forth Decadentism. However, for a study of the contemporary movement in French literature it would be advantageous to separate the two tendencies. This is easy enough, seeing that Symbolism has relation, above all, to the very foundation of the thought of the poets and writers of the group in question, while Decadentism is related to the expression of that thought. Up to this time Decadentism has been studied too much, Symbolism too little. Hence the confusion of criticism, which, itself ignorant of the fundamental side of the problem, has kept in ignorance the public wishing to draw inspiration from it. We are speaking naturally of a particular criticism, the official one in France: Brunetière, Doumic, Lemaitre, etc. Men like Mauclair or Beaunier were yet too young to give sufficient value to their authority against these pontiffs, at a time when that would have been necessary for the understanding of the new-comers. However, the two recent books by Kahn (*Symbolistes et Décadents*, Paris, Vanier, 1902) and by Beaunier (*La Poésie nouvelle*, éd. du Mercure de France, Paris, 1902) will henceforth render inexcusable, even among the general public, the superficial appreciation of Symbolism which has been the fashion up to now.

### I.

From the preceding it may be seen that virtually nothing has been said, or rather an incorrect statement has been made, by declaring that Symbolism consists simply of speaking in symbols, instead of employing ordinary terms. The use of the symbol with the poets of the new school is merely the

result of their whole attitude towards the world ; it is a means, not an end. Not the *how much*, nor the *how*, but the *why* of the symbol will give us the key to their art.

In order to understand what Symbolism really is, it must be remembered first of all that it is a reaction, a reaction against the naturalistic literature of yesterday. And what is Naturalism ? To define it in two words : it is the introduction of science into literature, and especially the introduction of scientific proceedings into literature. In science the absolute and the so-called metaphysical are banished from the beginning ; everything is examined from the relative point of view of cause and effect. More than that, preference is given to physical and physiological causes. To make of scientific examination and treatment the actual object of literature, this is what Zola and his disciples have done. To employ the same proceeding of mathematical accuracy in the world of thought, when the physiological or the physical causes themselves could not be reached ; to conceive of psychological phenomena as theorems,—this is what Bourget and the school of the psychological novelists have done. Bourget has, in fact, only speculated in a field left free by Zola ; he has looked for the natural causes in the internal life. That is also Naturalism, if the term is taken in its complete and logical sense. Both Zola and Bourget are, moreover, disciples of the same master, the positivist philosopher, H. Taine. Finally, the influence of science in literature has been so great that it has prevailed even in poetry, especially among the authors known by the name of “Parnassiens.” We find the elements of Naturalism not only in the spirit of their poetry, from which they have banished all dreaming, every thing that, so to speak, lacks consistency, and of which they require ideas that are clear, definite and logical, thus too often excluding emotion to make room for analysis ; but also in their language, which calls only for the correct term, strictly exact, scientifically cold.

The Symbolists have reacted upon all this, and from this reaction spring most of the characteristics of their writings. We will pass in review the principal ones. The majority of our examples have been chosen from Régnier, for two reasons: first, because he is pretty generally considered the most eminent poet of the group in France; then, also, because he has never allowed himself to be led into too great excesses. As our object is not to offer matter for jest to those who see only extravagances in the works of the Symbolists, but rather to find what there may be of good and of reasonable in their point of view, it is advantageous to be able to borrow what is needed, from a man like Régnier. He has emancipated himself with his fellow-poets, but, guided by an undisputable sense of the poetic, a very refined literary tact, and an aristocratic reserve in his sentiments, he has emancipated himself in a manner that is very correct, very elegant, and sometimes very prudent.

The first distinctive feature of Symbolism, in opposition to Naturalism, is that of discarding the element of mathematical precision in the descriptions, of stiff and dry exactness in the development of events. The means of accomplishing this which first presents itself to the mind, is that of separating as much as possible the subject of the poem, the novel, or the drama, from all the concrete conditions of existence. The time is not defined; there are novels by Régnier that might as well have taken place in ancient times as in the middle ages or in our days. Also there is no fixed place, the descriptions are, as a rule, very vague—which does not, however, prevent them from being very beautiful sometimes—so that it is impossible to find a word that would permit of placing geographically the locality of the scene. Régnier gives so little thought to the exactness of his descriptions that he sometimes makes curious topographical mistakes, as when he places a forest on the shores of the Delta in Egypt, near the pyramids and the sphinx (*Épisodes*: “Paroles dans la

Nuit, Sonnet-prélude"). Pierre Quillard gives the following indication at the beginning of his *Mystery, La Fille aux Mains coupées*: "*L'action se passe n'importe où, et plutôt au Moyen-Age.*" Moreover, to emphasize this feeling of non-realism in the reader, the Symbolists often let satyrs, fauns and centaurs frequent their forests; their lakes are peopled with nymphs and tritons. Or else they take their heroes directly from fairy-tales, as in the piece entitled, *Le Sixième mariage de Barbe-bleue*; or, finally, they place contemporary characters in a scene of other times. Régnier has a marked predilection for old castles in ruins and the old halls of the knights, where one is conscious of shadows all about and hears the voices of the past. He has, at times, an admirable manner of expression for carrying us into these surroundings of fairyland and fancy.

Rien ne souriait dans la maison natale  
 Grave de vieux silences accumulés  
 Et jamais on n'ouvrait la porte, car les clefs  
 On les avait perdues,  
 Un soir que toutes choses s'étaient tues;  
 Les pas y glissaient dans les couloirs dallés  
 Si tristement qu'on eût dit des pas  
 Qui s'en allaient mourir tout bas  
 Derrière les portes des autres salles. . . .

(*Tel qu'en Songe*—"Le Seuil.")

A very odd sensation is produced also by Laforgue's peculiar combinations of religious beliefs and rites. An excellent instance is found in his "*Lohengrin, fils de Parsifal*" (*Moralités légendaires*, III) where the Christian, Mussulman, Roman, Semitic, Gallic cults are combined into a strange and fanciful *mélange*.

Another characteristic of Symbolism consists in shaking off the yoke of the essential principles of science, the law of cause and effect: every effect has its determined, defined cause, and there is never more in the effect than in the cause. The Symbolists, without absolutely denying this principle, gladly take up the ancient idea of the Pythagoreans, that of the *Συμπάθεια πάντων*. A number of causes are overlooked

in giving an account of phenomena; those indicated, for instance, by scientists, are only the most striking and not even always the true ones. On the contrary, the mysterious influences, insignificant in appearance, are the ones which really determine the majority of events—and it is the value of these intimate causes, impalpable and imperceptible to our senses, and so mercilessly banished by the Naturalists, which the symbolists wish to point out. An excellent example, and one met with frequently, is the importance attributed to the silent fall of the dead leaves in a quiet autumn landscape.

“J’étais arrivé à un endroit de la forêt où elle m’apparut à sa suprême beauté automnale. De grands arbres espaçaient une carrière. Leur feuillage était roux et doré, et, bien que le soleil eût disparu, il semblait s’en continuer un éclat aux cimes où persévérait l’illusion de sa survie par la teinte de sa présence. Aucune des feuilles ne remuait et pourtant une parfois, d’or déjà terne et sec, d’or clair et encore vivant, tombait comme si le petit bruit mélancolique de la fontaine où elles reflétaient leurs suspens, eût suffi à déterminer dans la sorte d’indifférence silencieuse de l’air le prétexte de leur chute.

“Je regardais celles qui tombaient au bassin de la source. Deux, puis d’autres encore et une que je sentis frôler ma main. Je tressaillis, car j’attendais, anxieux de ce silence, pour continuer ma marche, que quelque cri d’oiseau ait rompu l’immobile sortilège. Tout se taisait d’arbre en arbre, et si loin que je me sentais pâlir moins peut être de solitude, que de cette carresse de feuille qui m’avait effleuré la main plus légère qu’au songe les lèvres même du souvenir. Je m’approchai de l’eau, instinctivement, pour y voir mon visage et l’y voyant pâle et perplexe, vieilli de tout ce qu’une onde ajoute de nocturne à ce qui s’y mire, je pensai à Hermogène, mon maître Hermogène.”—(*Contes à soi-même*—“Hermogène.”)

Here is another example, of a gentleman whose death is felt in an occult and mysterious way by the physical world in the midst of which he had lived :

“Comme si la présence paternelle imposait autour de soi par sa durée une sorte d’attitude aux êtres et aux choses, les effets de sa disposition se répandirent alentour. Tout se désagrégea. Des jointures invisibles craquèrent en quelque occulte dislocation. Les plus anciens serviteurs moururent un à un. Les chevaux des écuries périrent presque tous; on retrouvait les vieux chiens de meute engourdis à jamais, les yeux vitreux et le museau enfoui entre leurs pattes velues. Le château se dégrada; les combles se

délabrèrent; le soubassement se tassa; des arbres du parc s'abattirent, barrant les allées, écornant les buis; la gelée fendit la pierre des vasques; une statue tomba à la renverse et je me trouvai dans l'insolite solitude de la demeure déserte et des jardins bouleversés, comme au réveil d'une saison séculaire où j'eusse dormi les cent années du conte."

(*Contes à soi-même*—"Récit de la dame aux sept miroirs.")

Such curious protests against the encroachments of science have very much the appearance of a return to the beliefs of those times when science had not yet accomplished its work of destroying the faith in the supernatural. The one just quoted, for instance, cannot be read without calling to mind the recital of the death of Christ in the Gospels:

"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. . . . And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened and many bodies of the saints which slept arose. . . ."

Or that of the death of Roland:

"Meantime in France an awful scourge prevails:  
Wind, storm, rain, hail and flashing lightning bolts  
Conflict confusedly, and naught more true,  
The earth shook from Saint Michel-del-Peril  
As far as to the Saints, from Besançon  
Unto the sea-port of Guitzand; no house  
Whose walls unshaken stood; darkness at noon  
Shrouded the sky. No beam of light above  
Save when a flash rips up the clouds. Dismayed  
Beholders cry: 'The world's last day has come  
The destined end of all things is at hand!'  
Unwitting of the truth, their speech is vain  
'Tis dolour for the death of Count Rolland!"

(Translation by Rabillon.)

It is evident that in putting aside the natural causes of events—and by natural causes are understood those known to the scholar,—and in seeking to make men imagine occult actions everywhere, the Symbolists have been led to give up the naturalist and rationalist theory of the antagonism existing between science and religion. Some have made much ado

about this feature of Symbolism, which, however, ought not to mislead us. A correct statement of facts would require the substitution of the word metaphysics for religion. It is very true that one of these poets, Louis le Cardonnell, turned priest, and that others declared themselves good Catholics. But it is easy to see that even the most famous among these converts, Huysmans, did not embrace the traditional Catholicism. He set up for himself a religion of art, and wanted to invest it with reality by clothing it in the ritualistic forms of the church of his country. Also care must be taken not to confound the religion of the converted Verlaine with the mysticism of the Symbolists. Verlaine was a sincere Catholic at his time, and he was unconscious of the true character of his action when he sang the praises of a courtesan in the same words that he had used in singing the Holy Virgin. What the Symbolists of to-day seek above all is much less religious emotion in itself, than abnormal sensations, the effects of religious excitations on souls that have no faith. As has been said—and in this they descend in direct line from Baudelaire—"it is the research after sensations considered exquisite only because they are forbidden." It is not the ecstasy arising from a long continued contemplation of God, but the morbid ecstasy of nervous exhaustion. There is, no doubt, some relation between the two, but in the first the individual acts in good faith, while in the second he knows that there is question only of a physiological state of the nerves, to which there is no corresponding reality.

The following poem by le Cardonnell betrays the difference between genuine religious mysticism and the mysticism of the Symbolists, which is only metaphysical, one might even say agnostic :

*Tryptique.*

De neige dans la nuit de gaze  
Et des lueurs de nimbe au front  
Une sainte et son ange vont  
Ivres d'extase, ivres d'extase



Suivant leur ombre qui s'allonge  
Dans le clair de lune profond,  
Deux gratteurs de viole vont  
Ivres de songe, ivres de songe

En désertant la folle brume  
Où leurs os trouvaient le temps long  
Deux titubants squelettes vont  
Ivres de lune, ivres de lune.

The quality preferably developed in and by the symbolists is the intellect. Their heroes, almost without exception, possess a delicate and often subtle power of thought. They are thinkers, dreamers, empyreal philosophers. Never, or very rarely, are they men of action; they do not live, they are lived, they do not seem to know anything of the battle of life, they dream their existence, "ils se songent" according to an expression dear to Régnier; sometimes they even "se resongent." This is in keeping with their general attitude towards life. As Naturalists pretend to know the causes of everything and the working of them, they may, at least partly, hope to react upon them. Action has some meaning. Not so with the Symbolists who believe in unknown and unattainable causes. To them passivity is the natural attitude. Hence the veil of gentle sadness spread over the whole universe as seen by the majority of our authors. But it is a sadness *sui generis*, indefinite, vague, and might just as well be called simply lack of gladness. Joy is found in action, and when man does not act, he feels no joy. So, as joy is connected in the mind with the idea of activity, sadness is associated with the thought of passivity. The sadness of the symbolists is a sort of boredom.

It must be recognized however, that often, behind this boredom, there is something other than the simple distrust of action. There is a positive and manifest incapability of experiencing normal and healthy feelings. A foundation of truth cannot be denied the argument of M. Nordau; the word "degenerate" is perhaps a little strong, but there are

certainly several clearly pathological cases among our authors. We are in presence of extreme lymphatic temperaments, or those that pose as such. One of the commonest manifestations of this particular morbid propensity is their predilection for the autumn :

“ Une rose d'automne est plus qu'une autre exquise.”

Doubtless autumn has its charms, but in the Symbolists the love for the season which introduces death too often implies a corresponding and very strong antipathy for the other seasons which mark the return to life and its full bloom. The master, Stéphane Mallarmé, is very seriously affected in this way. Not only does he love all that is old, all that does not savor of “ l'action ” (“ Frisson d'hiver ”), but the coming of spring causes him a genuine nervous prostration :

“ Le printemps maladif a chassé tristement  
L'hiver, saison de l'art serein, de l'art lucide,  
Et dans mon être, à qui le sang morne préside,  
L'impuissance s'étire en un long baillement.  
Puis je tombe énérvé de parfums d'arbres, las,  
Et creusant de ma face un fossé à mon rêve,  
Mordant la terre chaude où poussent les lilas  
J'attends en m'abîmant que mon ennui s'élève.”

(“ Feuille surnuméraire.”)

He cries out in epileptic dismay at sight of an azure sky. He likes to contemplate things only indirectly, through the window-panes, or across the mists, “ ces chers brouillards qui emmitoufflent nos cervelles.”

While, however, one can prevent oneself from acting, one cannot at will think or not think. The mind lives, so to speak, in spite of us. But at least one need not trouble to think methodically, logically. Thought must be left to wander where it will ; instead of our directing it, it should be allowed to lead us. This manner of writing unsystematically, giving as large scope as possible to the association of ideas—

entirely individual, as goes without saying—has not a little contributed to gaining for the symbolists a reputation for incomprehensibility, against which it would be difficult to defend them. Moreover, the poet's mind, intentionally turned away from the practical side of life, fleeing the commonplace, is very apt to go astray in the speculative spheres little frequented by the general public. Thus he is led to perceive between events those strangely subtle relations of which mention has been made, that mysterious affinity between our feelings and nature. In terms of psychiatry this might be called hyperesthesia of the intellect. See what the philosopher Eustase has discovered in his adored Humbeline, and how a symbolist makes love. To the philosopher, Humbeline is an "abréviation de l'ensemble de l'univers."

"Chaque jour Eustase allait chez elle comme la veille, et le charme de la conversation qui se tenait entre la jeune femme et le philosophe était dû à l'échange loyal qu'ils faisaient entre eux de la réciproque utilité où ils s'étaient l'un à l'autre. Humbeline dispensait Eustase de se mêler à la vie. Les aspects s'en trouvaient pour lui résumés en l'instructive dame avec ce qu'ils ont de contradictoire et de divers. Cette délicate personne était à elle seule d'un tumulte exquis. Toute l'incohérence des passions existait en ses goûts, réduits à une dimension minuscule et à un mouvement infini mais équivalent. En surplus elle offrait à Eustase le souvenir de tous les paysages où s'efforce et s'exténue ce que nos sentiments y retrouvent de leur image. Les robes déjà pour leur part figuraient les nuances des saisons et l'ensemble de sa chevelure était à la fois tout l'automne et toutes les forêts. L'écho des mers murmurait certes en les conques naïves de ses oreilles. Ses mains fleurissaient les horizons dont les gestes traçaient les lignes flexibles.

"C'étaient ces ressemblances que lui interprétait Eustase; il lui en détaillait les infinitésimales analogies et lui donnait le plaisir d'avoir, à chaque instant, conscience de ce qu'elle était, agrandie de ce qu'elle semblait être. Elle touchait ainsi au monde par chaque pore de sa peau charmante et par chaque point de son égoïsme moite, friable et comme spongieux, n'aimant que soi dans tout, mais d'une façon communicative et amalgamée" ("Eustase et Humbeline"). And when sometimes "ils juxtaposaient leurs pas pour quelque promenade. . . . Eustase se promenait moins avec elle qu'en elle." He made delightful journeys there, and on his return liked to say to her: "Le couchant de votre chevelure fut d'un or bien tragique ce soir, Humbeline."

This example shows already in what consists the difference between the symbol of the Symbolists and that of the poets of tradition. The latter have no other purpose than to render their thought clearer and more precise by the use of the image; so much so as to make it impossible to misunderstand the idea presented. As one example may be quoted a few stanzas from the famous poem of Sainte Beuve, "La Rime." One picture follows the other to fix the conception of the author, to lay open his thought in all its aspects, to make it clear from all points of view :

Rime qui donne leurs sons  
 Aux chansons,  
 Rime, l'unique harmonie  
 Du vers, qui sans tes accents  
 Frémissements  
 Serait muet au génie.  
 . . . . .  
 Rime, *écho* qui prends la voix  
 Du haut bois  
 Ou l'éclat de la trompette,  
 Dernier adieu d'un ami  
 Qu'à demi  
 L'autre ami de loin répète;  
 . . . . .  
 Rime, *tranchant aviron*,  
*Éperon*  
 Qui fends la vague écumante;  
*Frein d'or, aiguillon d'acier*  
 Du coursier  
 A la crinière fumante;  
 . . . . .  
*Agrafe* autour des seins nus  
 De Vénus  
 . . . . .  
*Col étroit* par où saillit  
 Et jaillit  
 La source au ciel élancée.  
 . . . . .  
*Anneau pur* de diamant  
 . . . . .  
*Clef*. . . . .  
 . . . . .

*fée au léger voltiger*  
 . . . . . etc., etc.

Exactly the contrary is true of the Symbolists. They make use of the symbol just because *they do not* wish to present their thought in a clear and precise form. Thought is too subtle and varied to be really adequately expressed; words are too coarse interpreters to have the delicate feelings and sentiments of a poetic soul intrusted to them. Not only, therefore, must no effort be made to express one's feelings, to define them by words, but in order to be sure not to rob them of the airy something that is in them, one must speak only in the indefinite form of symbols:

"Ta pensée garde toi de la jamais nettement dire. Qu'en des jeux de lumière et d'ombre elle *semble* toujours se livrer et s'échapper sans cesse,—agrandissant de tels écarts l'esprit émerveillé d'un lecteur, comme il doit être, attentif et soumis—jusqu'au point final où elle éclatera magnifiquement *en se réservant, toutefois et encore, le nimbe d'une équivoque féconde* afin que les esprits qui t'ont suivi soient récompensés de leurs peines par la joie tremblante d'une découverte qu'ils *croiraient* faire, avec l'*illusoire* espérance d'une certitude qui *ne sera jamais*, et la réalité d'un *doute délicieux*. Ainsi sauvegardé par cette initiale prudence d'éviter la précision, tu iras, Poète, par tes propres intuitions, restées indépendantes, plus loin dans les voies même purement rationnelles que les plus méthodiques philosophes, et la plume te deviendra talisman d'invention, de vérité. Qu'alors on te reproche d'être obscur et compliqué, réponds: que les mots sont les vêtements de la pensée et que tous les vêtements voilent; que plus une pensée est grande et plus il la faut voiler, comme une enveloppe de verre les flammes des flambeaux et des soleils, mais que le voile ne cache un peu que pour permettre de voir d'avantage et plus sûrement."—(Ch. Morice: "La littérature de Tout à l'heure.")

All this is founded on the truth that to define is to limit. The more characters there are given to an object the more it is individualized, the less play it leaves to the imagination. To take a very simple example: given a circle drawn on a piece of paper, this circle can represent a great many things, an apple, a ball, a head, a cheese, a button, the sun, the moon, a watch, a ring, a wheel, a plate, a drum, etc., etc. But by adding only four small lines representing a mouth, a nose

and two eyes, the drawing can represent only a face, or perhaps for children the sun and the moon. By again adding two small handles on the sides, positively nothing else but the face of a man can be suggested. Therefore, since one of the principles of Symbolism is to replace the expression of things by the suggestion of them, and, moreover, to render the task of creating in the mind of the reader as considerable as possible with the help of suggestion, the natural means is that of defining as little as possible. In order to attain this end the Symbolist painter, Carrière, before trying to reproduce his model, retreated from it until he saw nothing more than a cloud. Thanks to this task of personal interpretation which is demanded of the reader, he becomes a fellow-worker with the poet; he produces by him and with him. This is a proceeding which the Symbolists are very proud to have introduced into art. Mallarmé, Boschot, Morice duly insist on it, and Régnier wrote not very long ago, “. . . et je ne suis pas sûr que ce ne soit pas la particularité qui leur vaudra le mieux la mémoire de l'avenir.”—(*Mercury de France*, August, 1900.)

There are two ways of making the task of the reader considerable: that of expressing as little as possible of the thought, and that of expressing it in the form of symbols so perfectly mysterious and vague as to make sure that the intimate idea of the poet be not betrayed.

After the first of these manners, M. René Ghil evidently arrived at genius at a stroke, when, in one part of his poem, “Le geste ingénu,” he leaves two large pages blank and then places at the bottom of the second, in a corner, this eloquent octosyllabic verse:

“Mille sanglots plangorent là !”

Nevertheless—in spite of the perfect logic of this system—the symbolists have found it to be expedient not to abuse this too deep poetry, and have striven to move their readers by other means than silence.

Whoever has read their works knows that it is possible to remain vague without keeping silence. It would be easy to quote a number of stanzas where surely no one, excepting at best the author, could find any sense. It is better to quote some of the less unintelligible ones, in order to place our finger on the point. One passage is chosen from Régnier, who, for that matter, has been forward enough in this tendency, but whose verses are in some fashion comprehensible in spite of the obscurity of the thought.

On the threshold of life the poet figures to himself his fate :

"Et je pensais mes Destinées.  
 Je les voulais, hautes et graves, emphatiques  
 En un clair drapement de gloire et taciturnes  
 Avec des orgueils sur les lèvres, les unes !  
 Et magnifiques  
 Avec des torses nus à la proue  
 Parmi les fleurs des mers en écumes  
 Avec des torches en leurs mains spoliatrices,  
 Ou graves et dures  
 Et lentes avec des palmes sous les portiques  
 Où des enfants jettent des pierres aux armures  
 Qui se bossellent et retéussent,  
 Et hiératiques sur des sièges de marbre  
 Où leur front se repose à leur geste immuable  
 . . . . .  
 Et lentement j'imaginai mes Destinées.  
 Elles serraient des glaives à la poignée  
 Elles marchaient le long de la mer  
 Elles marchaient dans le soleil  
 Puis elles s'assirent le long de la mer  
 Elles saignèrent dans le soleil  
 De leurs pourpres traînant sur le sable amer  
 L'emblème douloureux que saignerait leur chair. . . ."  
 (*Tel qu'en Songe*—"Le Seuil.")

Prose does not exclude this use of the symbol. One need only quote Régnier's very typical symbolistic story entitled "Hertulie ou les Messages" (*Trèfle Noir*). Hermotie loves Hertulie. They meet every day for aerial conversations in a garden mysteriously arranged and decorated. One day

Hermotine leaves without saying good-bye and sends tidings in the form of symbolistic objects: an arrow, a gourd, a mirror, a key, a ripe ear, all of which are deposited in turn in the house of Hertulie by an invisible hand. It seems that he has left her, to love her after a fashion still more ethereal. At least that appears to be implied by the letter written to his friend, Hermas, at the time of his abrupt departure:

"Elle accusera mon amour, et si je la quitte, c'est à cause de l'amour. L'amour seul nous fait nous-mêmes; il nous rend comme nous serions, car il devient ce que nous sommes. . . . L'amour est beau. La laideur seule de nos âmes grimace sur son masque qui les représente. . . . Imagine alors ô Hermas, la beauté, si au lieu de se grimer en des cœurs ténébreux, il se dénudait en des âmes radieuses. . . . L'amour est l'hôte de la sagesse et je pars lui préparer sa demeure. . . ."

He will not come back—that is a thing of course; and she will die of grief. As for the symbolic objects, Régnier has pity on his readers, and, in a final letter, permits the friend, Hermas, more perspicacious than they, to furnish enlightenment:

"J'ai compris l'envoi de la flèche messagère; faite de plume et d'acier, elle allège en nous ce qui peut s'envoler, elle tue ce qui doit y mourir. Le poignard nu signifiait déjà ton mortel désir d'être un autre homme, et la gourde voulait dire ta soif de te connaître au miroir emblématique là où l'on s'apparaît au delà de soi-même; mais quand j'ai reçu la clef fatidique, j'ai deviné qu'elle t'ouvrait l'accès de ton Destin, et l'épi mûr, ô Hermotine! te représente à mes yeux."

Some of the symbols used by our poets are particularly characteristic. Two of them may be mentioned here. First the mirror, symbol of solitude and meditation. Contemplating oneself in a mirror is seeing oneself outside of oneself—"miroir emblématique où l'on s'apparaît au delà de soi-même." In a case of close intimacy, a man may become the mirror of another:

"Je m'apparus en toi comme une ombre lointaine."

(Mallarmé.)

In love, a woman may become the mirror of a man. In Régnier she tries often to be that, but he does not believe



her, in general, equal to the task. The fate of Hertulie has been indicated already. In other poems, by the same author, there appear women who have awaited sometimes for centuries, even "depuis l'éternité," *the* man whose mirror they might be. But he does not come, or passes without stopping :

"Mets notre chevelure en pennon à ta hampe  
Doux chevalier; rêve par nous ton rêve épars,  
Et viens à nous de par la vie et les hasards,  
Nous sommes le Miroir, et l'Amphore et la Lampe."  
(*"La Vigile des Grèves"*—*Poèmes anciens et romanesques.*)

Another symbol dear to the Symbolists in general and to Régnier in particular, is nudity. It is incredible how often the adjective *nu* is found in his prose and poetry. The reader may remember having seen it in several of the preceding quotations. We must take it, so to speak, as the symbol of the symbol, such as it was described above. The use of this term is due to their desire to leave the idea bare of all determining qualities, in order that the reader himself may invest it with specific attributes according to his temperament or to his passing moods. A few examples may render this clearer :

"J'ai cru voir ma Tristesse—dit-il—et je l'ai vue  
—Dit-il plus bas—  
Elle était nue  
Assise dans la grotte la plus silencieuse  
De mes plus intérieures pensées  
. . . . .  
Elle y était silencieuse  
Assise au fond de mon silence  
Et nue ainsi que s'apparaît ce qui pense.  
(*Tel qu'en Songe*—  
"Quelqu'un songe d'aube et d'ombre.")

Or this :

"L'enfant qui vint ce soir était nu  
Il cueillait des roses dans l'ombre  
Il sanglotait d'être venu  
Il reculait devant son ombre  
C'est en lui nu  
Que mon destin s'est reconnu."  
(*Ibid.*)

Or again :

“ . . . . . la lassitude  
De son espoir en pleurs près de son orgueil nu.”

His Gods, his heroes, his women are very likely to be nude symbols. The beautiful poem in the *Épisodes*, “Les mains belles et justes,” is the most characteristic production of the poet from this point of view. He extols in ample verses the beautiful hands “qui n’ont jamais filé,” and in the following stanzas regrets that the whole body is concealed, the mouth and eyes covered with paint, and the breast, the hips, etc., veiled by garments, veils “dont le rêve s’indigne.” Only the “beautiful” hands are bare and speak to the mystic soul of the poet. May these hands also be “just” and tear off the veils which shroud “les purs nus triomphaux,” and may a bath take away the paint!

This image is often met with in the other symbolists, as has been said. The following line by René Ghil is often quoted :

“Nu du nu grandiose et pudique des roses.”

Or this from Rodenbach :

“Le ciel est gris, mon âme est grise  
Elle se sent toute déprise  
Elle se sent un parler nu. . . .”

The intentional lack of sharp outlines, or the overlapping of our different perceptions and thoughts has brought forth in the domain of sensation another peculiarity of the Symbolists. As it has often been made use of to ridicule the young poets, it may be well to show how it is logically connected with their general attitude towards life. Not only do they understand everything after their own fashion, but they are endowed with an acuteness of the senses which makes them see, hear, taste, smell, and touch differently from men in general. Their sensibility depends very little on their specific senses; the sensations derived from the latter being blended in one spiritual sphere, whence every material element seems to be banished. In other words, the sharpness of their senses

is such that they obtain the sensation of sound by their eyes, their mouth, and their nose, just at well as with their ears. In the same way they have visual impressions through the ears and sensations of touch through their olfactory organs.

The best known of these interchanges or substitutions of sensations is the reciprocal calling forth of sounds by colors and of colors by sounds. One single sonnet of the Symbolists has done more to popularize this phenomenon than all the patient investigations of experimental psychologists :

*"A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu, voyelles*  
*Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes*  
*A noir corset velu des mouches éclatantes*  
*Qui bombillent autour des puanteurs cruelles,*  
  
*Golfe d'Ombre ; E candeur des vapeurs et des tentes*  
*Lance des glaciers fiers, rois blancs, frissons d'ombelles ;*  
*I pourpre, sang craché, rire des lèvres belles*  
*Dans la colère et les ivresses pénitentes ;*  
  
*U, cycles, vibrations divins des mers virides*  
*Paix des pâtis semés d'animaux, paix des rides*  
*Que l'alchimie imprime aux grands fronts studieux ;*  
  
*O Suprême clairon, plein de strideurs étranges*  
*Silences traversés des Mondes et des Anges*  
*—O l'oméga, rayon violet de ses yeux."*

Some friends of the late Rimbaud, the author of this sonnet, maintain that it is merely a joke. There is, however, reason to believe that they admitted this interpretation only when they saw the ridicule cast upon it by the public. It seems to have been meant very seriously at first.<sup>1</sup> Besides,

<sup>1</sup> In his *Saison en enfer*, Rimbaud writes: "A moi l'histoire d'une de mes folies . . . j'inventai la couleur des voyelles! *A noir, E blanc, I rouge, O bleu, U vert.* Je réglai la forme et le mouvement de chaque consonne et avec des rythmes instinctifs, je me flattai d'inventer un verbe poétique, accessible un jour ou l'autre à tous les sens. . . . Ce fut d'abord une étude, j'écrivais des silences, des nuits, je notais l'inexprimable, je fixais des vertiges." M. Kahn comments as follows upon this passage: "Le texte est net. Le sonnet des voyelles ne contient pas plus une esthétique qu'il n'est une gageure, une gaminerie pour étonner le bourgeois. Rimbaud

the idea is not a new one. As is known, it has been expressed by Baudelaire, and no one has thought of maintaining that he was in fun. Moreover, since Rimbaud, the idea has been taken up so repeatedly that it is impossible to call in question the seriousness of the poets who make use of it.

On the same subject, for instance, are written the following inspiring lines of René Ghil, one of the "enfants terribles" of Symbolism.

"Constatant les souverainetés, les Harpes sont blanches; et bleus sont les Violons mollis souvent d'une phosphorescence pour surmener les paroxysmes; en la plénitude des ovations les Cuivres sont rouges, les Flûtes, jaunes, qui modulent l'ingénu, s'étonnent de la lueur des lèvres; et sourdeur de la Terre et des Chairs, synthèse simplement des seuls instruments simples, les orgues toutes noires plangorent" (*Traité du Verbe*).

Finally it has been most elaborately worked out by Régnier in his story, *Le Sixième mariage de Barbe bleue*.

The scene is laid in Brittany, the land of legends. A man sits dreaming in a boat that drifts on the quiet current of the water. Arriving at twilight in a bay of the river, whence he sees a house, he goes ashore to pick a rose in the garden. A woman appears and shows him the ruins of Blue-beard's castle. There seem to wander about them the shades of Blue-beard's wives "nues de leurs robes appendues au mur du réduit sinistre où le sang successif des cinq épouses avait rougi les dalles! . . . Comment eussent-elles erré autrement que nues puisque leurs belles robes avaient été la raison de leur mort et le seul trophée que voulût d'elles leur singulier mari?"

There follows a description of the gowns, on account of which they had had to die. The "bizarre et barbu seigneur" loved all these women. Why then did he kill them? Be-

traversa une phase où tout altéré de nouveauté poétique, il chercha dans les indications réunies sur les phénomènes d'audition colorée quelque rudiment d'une science des sonorités. Il vivait près de Charles Cros, à ce moment hanté de sa photographie des couleurs et qui put l'orienter vers des recherches de ce genre" (Kahn, *Symbolistes et Décadents*, p. 275).

cause he wanted them only in order to draw from them certain sensations, which he could obtain without them just as well after a short time. He could suggest them artificially; the women need only to leave him a remembrance of their figures, of the subtle fragrance of their flesh. Having that, he could dispense with their material and real presence. They became useless. To quote Régnier :

“Hélas, il ne les aima que pour leurs robes variées, ces épouses douces et altières, et sitôt qu’elles avaient façonné les étoffes qui les vêtaient aux grâces de leur corps, qu’elles y avaient imprégné le parfum de leur chair et communiqué assez d’elles-mêmes pour qu’elles leur fussent devenues consubstantielles, il tuait d’une main cruelle et sage les Belles inutiles. Son amour en détruisant, substituait au culte d’un être celui d’un fantôme fait de leur essence dont le vestige et le mystérieux délice satisfaisaient son âme industrielle.”

This is not all. To add still more to the suggestion called up by the shape of the gown, its color, and the subtle perfume emanating from it, Blue-beard—a thorough Symbolist, as is seen—had the furniture and hangings matched to these sensations. Finally he completed his work by having melodies played which corresponded to the tone of the perfume, the color, and the shape of each lady called up, and by reserving a special room for each gown with its group of corresponding sensations :

“L’ingénieux Seigneur s’enfermait pendant de longues soirées, tour à tour, dans l’une de ces salles où brûlait un parfum différent. Les mobiliers assortis aux tentures, correspondaient à des intentions subtiles. Longtemps, passant sa main dans sa longue barbe parsemée de quelques poils d’argent; l’Amant solitaire regardait la robe appendue devant lui en la mélancolie de sa soie, l’orgueil de son brocart ou la perplexité de sa moire. Des musiques appropriées sourdaient du dehors à travers les murailles. Auprès de la robe blanche (ô tendre Emmène, ce fut la tienne!) rôdaient des lenteurs de viole languissante; auprès de la bleue (qui fut toi, naïve Poucette!) le hautbois chantait; près de la tienne, mélancolique Blismonde, un luth soupirait parcequ’elle fut mauve et que tes yeux étaient toujours baissés; un fifre riait, suraigu pour rappeler que tu fus énigmatique, en ta verte robe encorailée Tharsile! mais tous les instruments s’unissaient quand le maître visitait la robe d’Alède, robe singulière qui avait toujours semblé vêtir un fantôme; alors la musique chuchotait tout bas, car Barbe-bleue avait beaucoup aimé cette Alède. . . .”

The master of the place, however, still missed something in the sensations of love. He sought a sixth wife. He loved a shepherdess. What wedding-dress would she wear? As she was not rich, she thought her nudity would be her finest ornament, and by her innocence she broke the charm that had doomed to death the five first brides, for without a dress she could not leave her lord either the cast of her figure, nor the particular perfume of her flesh. If she were killed, she would be dead for Blue-beard as well.

The few facts mentioned will be sufficient to show that, for almost every single characteristic feature of Naturalism, Symbolism has developed another one in an opposite direction. To a few laws of nature discovered by scientists and put to use by naturalists, the Symbolists have opposed innumerable causes of a metaphysical order (metaphysical to be taken in the Aristotelian sense); to a stiff and conventional world they have opposed one of fancy; to the every-day type of man, the most extreme cases of individualism; to the normal, the abnormal; to determinism, occultism; to simplicity, complexity.

In so doing they have rendered a service to literature which ought not to be disregarded. They have taken up again the true artistic tradition of yore, they have broken the false ideal of identifying science with art. Science deals, if I may be allowed to use the expression, with the skeleton of life; different manifestations are completely isolated from the concrete conditions of existence, and studied in the abstract; but art deals with real, concrete, full life.

The time may come when Symbolism will be regarded as a simple prolongation of Romanticism. Its originality will appear substantially diminished the day when some one shall undertake to compare the Symbolists, for instance, with V. Hugo. Their desire to go beyond the laws known to science, which is their central preoccupation, corresponds almost exactly in V. Hugo to what Mabilleau has so well called *le*

*sens du mystère*. "The poet has succeeded in acquiring—at least in imagination—a kind of intuition of that which is out of reach of both senses and perception. Time and space, or rather eternity and infinite, chaos, night, death, that which is indeterminate in things, unknown in thoughts, the unattainable and the inexpressible—all this he feels, and renders it in images that convey to us his own feelings."

To make good use of this "*sens du mystère*" requires nothing less than genius. Now Symbolism in France, it must be recognized, has produced only rude outlines and sketches of an ideal masterpiece. Its votaries' distinct influence on their contemporaries is mainly due to the fact that they have uttered a common protest, which, practically, proved more effective than isolated genius alone; then, too, their very timely appearance, when a thorough reaction against Naturalism was most needed, must also be taken into account. But these are only contingencies which do not in the least affect the principle in itself. There have been Symbolists elsewhere than in France. No one, for instance, seems to have possessed in a more remarkable fashion the talents required for their special kind of literary products than Edgar Allan Poe. No one can be said to have better pointed out the existence of astonishing relations, which science does not mention,<sup>1</sup> between phenomena apparently utterly disconnected. No one has better hinted at a secret world and minute inter-actions beyond the realm of sensations, without ever betraying the least belief in arbitrariness in the deepest mysteries. It is not astonishing that the French Symbolists feel for E. A. Poe a great admiration, which, however, has not resulted in a satisfactory imitation, excepting, perhaps, in a few of the works of Maeterlinck.

Again, both Romanticism and Symbolism are plainly individualistic tendencies. Here lies, it is true, one great difference between the two schools; one could say that individualism

<sup>1</sup>At least, it did not mention them until the "Society for Psychical Research" was founded.

is developed in the sense of quantity with the Romanticists, but in the sense of quality with the Symbolists. The first put into their works an ego that is common to all men. It is only in the intensity of emotion and feeling that their poets really differ from ordinary people. On the contrary, Mallarmé and his disciples wish to put forward the peculiarly individual part of the ego in their characters,—in whose forms they often disguise themselves—the *exceptional* ego, as they call it themselves; an exceptional which often assumes the form of artificial, abnormal and morbid cases, as when a naturally sensual woman seeks gratification of her depraved tastes in chastity, in “l’horreur d’être vierge” (*Hérodiade*, by Mallarmé), or a man who spends incredible sums of money to produce by selection natural flowers which shall have the appearance of artificial ones (Huysmans’ *Des Esseintes*).

And yet, does not this very curiosity for the exceptional, which develops so easily into the taste for the physically and morally ugly, remind us of some of Victor Hugo’s best known characters, from the Quasimodo in *Notre Dame de Paris*, to the Crapaud of the *Légende des Siècles*? Or, in general, of the theory expressed in these verses of the “Réponse à un acte d’accusation :”

“Pas de prunelle abjecte et vile que ne touche  
L’éclair d’en haut, parfois tendre et parfois farouche;  
Pas de monstre chétif, louche, impur, chassieux  
Qui n’ait l’immensité des astres dans les cieux.”

## II.

All we have said so far was with reference to the philosophy of Symbolism. But, paradoxical as it may at first sight appear, with regard to the form adopted for its literature Symbolism is in still more direct connection with earlier writers of the nineteenth century.

There are two kinds of formal so-called innovations of the symbolists which it is important to distinguish. Some may



be considered more specifically and logically symbolistic, some have no necessary connection with this literary movement.

Let us first consider the latter. A whole series of accusations which have been directed, as it happens, against the Symbolists might be brought with equal justice against other writers. In unison with all contemporary authors, they have sought to renovate the literary language. Who could blame them? When this is done with moderation, tact, and taste, it is but commendable. There is no reason, for example, why a nation should stick for ages to the same old stock of poetical comparisons without ever renewing them. Régnier likes to compare the redness of sunset to blood; he writes beautiful lines on this subject, and that is enough to justify him :

“ Le soleil saigne aux Occidents stigmatisés  
Elargissant sa plaie en la pourpre des nues  
Qu’attisent les pointes de glaives aiguisés.”

(“Jouvence”—*Épisodes*.)

The following is certainly an original manner of speaking of a bird’s song, but it is laughable only when judged at first sight, or because it is different from what is customary :

“ J’entendis sur l’étang chanter votre oiseau d’or :  
Le bois clair se gemme de voix de pierreries,  
De voix de diamants, de voix de rubis, de voix de saphir,  
Et le chant s’exhale plus riche à se fleurir  
Et l’oiseau semblait crier des pierreries.”

(“Le songe de la forêt”—*Poèmes anciens et rom.*)

The following is a clever picture by Verhaeren :

“ Les horloges  
Volontaires et vigilantes  
Pareilles aux vieilles servantes  
Boitant de leurs sabots ou glissant sur leurs bas,  
Les horloges que j’interroge  
Serrent ma peur en leurs compas. . . .”

The same must be said with regard to the peculiar combinations in the vocabulary of the symbolists. Régnier has

“des souvenirs blancs et noirs;” his heroes utter “des mensonges bleus;” their heads are adorned by “de chantantes chevelures;” they employ their “mains ténébreuses;” they are lost in the contemplation of vases “fragiles, compliqués et taciturnes,” while they are surrounded by “ténèbres endolories.” But, if such expressions are, perhaps, more frequent with our poets than with other contemporaries, similar ones can nevertheless be found in the works of even hardened realists. Zola uses “ombres bleues” and even “gaités blondes.” Daudet speaks of “après-midi blondes.” All the first pages of the very realistic novel by Caraguel, *Les Barthozouls*, are a classic example of the new style. To give one more illustration, what has contributed more to the success of Judith Gautier’s delightful volumes than her exquisite use in French of the strange and poetic images of the Orient?

To speak now of the elements of form more specifically connected with Symbolism, the most important seems to be the principle formulated by Verlaine and constantly repeated by those who make use of his name, namely, that the new poetry must, above all, be musical. The idea of this theory is easy to grasp. The essence of symbolic art, as has been abundantly proved, consists in reacting upon the fixedness and precision of Naturalism in all fields, in blurring the outlines and blending the colors, in suggesting the thought by the emotions, and not the emotions by the thought expressed in words. Music does just this, and it was hence quite natural to resort to its means and its method of action, *i. e.*, to seek the poetic effects wanted from the sound of the words and verses rather than from their meaning:

“De la musique avant toute chose,  
Et pour cela préfère l’Impair  
Plus vague et plus soluble dans l’air  
Sans rien en lui qui pèse ou qui pose.  
(Verlaine: *Jadis et Naguère*.)

This explains the frequent return to the still undeveloped and therefore undefined and unprecise literary methods of poetry in the middle ages, to alliteration and assonance. They sometimes, with the Symbolists, take the place of rhyme, sometimes are used together with it.

Alliteration :

“ Des couples amoureux s'arrêtent  
Et hument dans l'air lourd la langueur du Léthé.”  
(Stuart Merrill: “ Les gemmes.”)

Assonance :

“ La foule des Filles mi-nues  
Ondule en la houle des jours;  
Midi divinise des nues  
La foule des Filles mi-nues.  
Un hymne aux rimes inconnues  
S'essore vers les hauts séjours;  
La foule des Filles mi-nues  
Ondule en la houle des jours.” (Ibid.)

In this stanza, as in many other instances, there is not only assonance, but a combination of the three musical elements of verse: assonance, alliteration, and rhyme.

Here is another example of rhyme strengthened by assonance and by internal rhyme :

“ C'est à cause du clair de la lune  
Que j'assume ce masque nocturne  
Et de Saturne penchant son urne  
Et de ces lunes, l'une après l'une.” (Verlaine.)

Many new words in the so often satirized Symbolistic vocabulary, as well as the obsolete terms resurrected, are inspired by the same principle: they are used on account of their musical qualities: *clangorer*, *édénique*, *hymniclame*, *callipédique*, *ithyphallique*, etc. Furthermore, it must be admitted that certain of their new formations aim at producing sensational effects: *anacampsérote*, *bardocuculé*, *tarrabalation*, etc.

It may be well to remark here that the Symbolism of sound in poetry is more natural in a country of music like Germany, and would not have caused so much surprise there as in

France. No extensive research would be needed to find numerous instances of German verses in which the relations between the sounds and the sense to be expressed are even more divergent than in the Symbolist poetry. Reference may be made to several pages on this subject by Richard M. Meyer, "*Künstliche Sprachen*" (*Indogerm. Forschungen*, October, 1901; pp. 243 ff.). He quotes, for example, a recent poem by R. Dehmel, *Der Glühende*:

. . . . "Singt mir das Lied vom Tode und vom Leben  
Daglioni, gleia, glühlala."

This refrain, invented by the author, shows but a faint resemblance to the word *glühen*. These are not even musical words, but only sounds. The Symbolists in France have not gone so far as this.

In an exactly opposite direction, but with the same purpose of suiting the expression to the emotion that is to be roused, the new poets have been led to overstep the limits of traditional versification. Their fondness for their ideas was strong enough to lead them to the extremes of the free verse (*vers libre*). For them "verse, after all, is but a consequence and a result; it should grow according to, and it should be subordinate and proportional to, what it is to express or to suggest; it is nothing in itself and should only be what it is made. In short, verse is but a part of the rhythm, which alone it should obey" (Régner). It would, however, be a mistake to consider this a great innovation.

It is natural that G. Kahn, who first formulated this theory and was one of the first to make use of the "vers libre," should have exaggerated its significance. Purely from the point of view of prosody, at least, the poets using the "vers libre" have simply put into definite form, with its logical and final consequences, what V. Hugo and his friends timidly attempted by means of reforms which at that time seemed unspeakably daring: the displacing of the caesura, and letting the sense

run on into the next line. The natural result of these two reforms is, on the one hand, to lengthen or shorten the poetic sentence. On the other hand, since the rhyme was very often used simply to strengthen the effect of syllabism, by furnishing in its turn a regular and obvious division supporting that of the caesura, the rhyme is only an assonance placed anywhere in the poetic phrase. The rhyme as such may be said to be suppressed. As has been seen, assonance has, in fact, often taken its place in the poetry of the Symbolists. Thus, starting from the poets of the romantic school, the blank verse and the "vers libre" are nothing but a logical consequence. Exploits, or jests, such as the following by Verlaine, serve as transition :

"En fait d'amour, tu ressucite-  
Kais un défunt. . . ."

Or

"Voyez Banville et voyez Lecon-  
Te de Lisle. . . ."

The reason why the Symbolists were the ones to definitely complete the evolution of the blank verse and of the "vers libre," is that the spirit of their poetry was peculiarly adapted to it. But the instrument was there.

In spite of appearances absolutely contradictory, it is found even in Banville. When the punctilious theorist of the "Parnassiens" sums up his whole chapter on poetic licenses in the words: "Il n'y en a pas," he simply expresses the Symbolistic principle of versification. For him "le poète pense en vers," i. e., the form and the matter are *a priori* bound together in the conception of the poet. The idea necessarily presents itself to him in form of verses, or else he is no true poet, but only an imitator. It is just this that the modern poets wish also. Only, while Banville declares that the true poet always thinks in verses which are in keeping with the prosody of his *Petit Traité de Poésie française*, the Symbolists declare that there are as many good prosodies as there are true poets or even poems. In that they come

nearer the truth than Banville; there is not the same artificiality in them as in the author of the *Petit Traité*.<sup>1</sup>

The meaning of all this is, that behind the rules and greater than they, is always the poet. It is only when the rhythm is but faintly perceptible, and only at intervals, that the field of pure poetry is left for that of poetic prose. An example of this is the following stanza from "La Dame à la faulx" by Saint-Pol-Roux :

" En leur robe d'aurore  
Images de la vie,  
Voici, minces et riantes  
S'avancer les fiancées  
Des cinq étudiants  
Qui ce jour d'hui chevauchent avec le prince vers la ville  
Après l'échange en ces murailles de l'anneau des fiançailles.  
Suivent les gens de la Vallée  
Pastoures, vigneron, moissonneurs, bûcherons,  
Chargés de dons ayant pour Orient la châtelaine au front de blé."

The lines of 14, 15 and 18 syllables are no longer verses, while, in fact, the one next to the last is a double verse of six syllables with rhyme, and the seventh can be decomposed in the same fashion.

Such passages are, however, rather scarce. It may, on the contrary, be said that almost always the Symbolists retain either syllabism or rhyme in their verse, sometimes even the refrain. By this they implicitly acknowledge that an arti-

<sup>1</sup>The contradiction in Banville amounts to this: he does not consider as poetic licence what the traditional authors and poets call by that name. He speaks as follows of the run-over verse, which is of extreme importance in the case in hand. Letting the sense overflow into the next line has a justification, therefore it is not a poetical licence. "Quelle est," he says, "la valeur poétique et historique de la règle qu'ils (three verses of Boileau enjoining the observance of this rule) énoncent?—Nulle. Elle n'existe pas, elle ne saurait exister et pourtant elle a fait bien du mal. . . .

" Cette règle qui l'a imaginée, formulée, édictée?—Boileau—Qui a mis hors la loi, dévoué aux dieux infernaux les poètes qui refusaient d'obéir à cette règle?—Boileau—Sur quoi Boileau appuyait-il sa règle draconienne?—sur rien."

ficial element, however slight, is nevertheless necessary. They are often very clever indeed at hiding the outer devices, and so obtain effects the more remarkable that the means of their production are harder to detect.

The following lines by Viélé Griffin are an illustration of the above :

“ Je leur dirai  
 Que rien ne pleure, ici,  
 Et que le vent d'automne aussi  
 Lui qu'on croit triste est un hymne d'espoir ;  
 Je leur dirai  
 Que rien n'est triste ici, matin et soir,  
 Sinon, au loin.  
 Lorsque Novembre bruit aux branches  
 Poussant les feuilles au loin des sentes blanches.  
 — Elles fuient, il les relance  
 Jusqu'à ce qu'elles tombent lasses,  
 Alors il passe et rit—  
 Que rien n'est triste ici.  
 Sinon au loin sur l'autre côte  
 Monotone comme en sonnant la même note  
 Le heurt des haches brandi tout un jour  
 Pesant et sourd.”

The contrast with other times is due to the fact that the sensibility to the rhythm has grown with the ages. It would be wronging the modern literary sense to believe it necessary to have recourse to the methods of versification of the *Roi d'Yvetot* in order to rouse the faculty of poetic perception. But it does not follow from the fact that the distinction between prose and verse has become more delicate, that there exists no such distinction. It should especially be remembered that the printer's art does not make the poet.

To quote the clearest example, the *Poèmes en prose* by Paul Fort generally contain very harmonious lines, only instead of being placed one below the other, they are printed one after the other like sentences in prose :

Cette fille elle est morte, est morte dans ses amours.  
 Ils l'ont portée en terre, en terre au point du jour.

Ils l'ont couchée toute seule, toute seule en ses atours,  
 Ils l'ont couchée toute seule, toute seule en son cercueil.  
 Ils sont rev'nus gaiment, gaiment avec le jour  
 Ils ont chanté gaiment, gaiment : "chacun son tour,  
 Cette fille, elle est morte, est morte dans ses amours. . ."  
 Ils sont allés aux champs, aux champs comme tous les jours.

In the ballad of "Paris sentimental", *Sur le Pont au Change*, the second stanza is entirely composed of alexandrines, if the silent syllables are only a bit arranged :

Sept heures vont sonner à l'horloge du palais. ||—L'occident, sur Paris,  
 est comme un lac d'or plain. || Dans l'est nuageux gronde un orage incertain. ||  
 L'air est chaud par bouffées, à peine l'on respire. || Et je songe à  
 Manon et deux fois je soupire. || L'air est chaud par bouffées et berce  
 l'odeur large || de ces fleurs qu'on écrase. . . . On soupire en voyant || de  
 frais courants violets, s'étirer sous les arbres || du Pont-Neuf qui poudroie  
 sur le soleil mourant. ||—"Tu sais, toi Manon, si je t'ai bien aimée!" ||  
 L'orage gronde au loin. L'air est chaud par bouffées.

So there is no need for anxiety in regard to the future of French poetry. Neither of its two formal elements, rhyme and syllabism, has disappeared, nor is called upon to vanish completely. The rhyme is often transformed into alliteration and assonance, but it was in itself nothing except an assonance employed very systematically; moreover, it had come to be less of a musical element than simply an automatic teller to announce the end of a rythmical period to the idle or slow ear. Thus, even if the rhyme were droppod, there would still remain syllabism with its natural corollary of rythmical accentuation, which is the only absolutely indispensable element. Often verses have been quoted from the prose of Rousseau, of Buffon, of Chateaubriand, of Renan; it is obviously only the arrangement and number of syllables that make verse in these cases; there is no rhyme nor assonance.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>A few examples may be interesting here. This is a famous passage in Buffon, *Le cheval*:

"La plus noble conquête—que jamais l'homme ait faite—est celle de ce



In brief, then, the reform of the Symbolists in the field of French prosody might be reduced to the assertion that either the number of the syllables, or the element of sound now called rhyme, would be sufficient for the production of verse, one of them alone just as well as the two together. Nevertheless they have so little given up the use of them either separately or even together that not only the independent critics, but they themselves in estimating each other's works, admire most those verses which are the most regularly constructed and truly Parnassian. "Le bateau ivre," by Rimbaud, is written in stanzas of four verses alternately rhyming and entirely in accordance with the traditional rules, except for one irregularity, the singular *lenteur* rhyming with the plural *chanteurs*. The "Sonnet des Voyelles" is also regular; and so are "Les mains belles et justes," by Régnier; the "Complaintes" and the "Imitation de Notre Dame la Lune," by Laforgue, where only a few irregularities are to be found; the *Serres Chaudes*, by Maeterlinck, etc., etc., without counting the large number of octosyllabic verses by Verlaine. The following charming fancy, though written by Stuart Merrill, would unhesitatingly be attributed to Banville by one not knowing:

Par les nocturnes boulingrins  
 Les crincrins et les mandolines  
 Modulent de demi-chagrins  
 Sous la vapeur des mousselines.

fier et fougueux animal—Qui partage avec lui les fatigues de la guerre—et la gloire des combats."

In Marmontel's *Incas* (quoted by Boschot, *Crise poétique*):

"Le ciel était serein, l'air calme et sans vapeur—et l'on eût pris en ce moment—l'horizon du coucher pour celui de l'aurore."

The following from Rousseau, whom Mirabeau had called "notre plus grand harmoniste:—"

"Ses yeux étincelaient du feu de ses désirs. . . .

"Mon faible cœur n'a plus que le choix de ses fautes. . . .

"Mais j'ai lu mieux que toi dans ton cœur trop sensible. . . .

"Où m'entraînent les chevaux avec tant de vitesse? . . . O amitié!  
 O amour! est-ce là votre accord? Sont-ce là vos bienfaits? . . . As-tu bien consulté ton cœur en me chassant. . . ."

Bleus de lune, au vert des massifs  
 Les jets d'eau tintent dans les vasques  
 Et c'est parmi les petits ifs  
 Comme des rires sous des masques.

En poudre et panier pompadour  
 Et des roses pourpres aux lèvres  
 Les marquises miment l'amour  
 Avec des manières si mièvres. . . .

\*   \*   \*

Symbolism, as a doctrine, like all literary tendencies, reflects the spirit of its surroundings. The Symbolists have often been reproached their nervousness, the morbid character of their literature, and the lack of will power and energy in the majority of their works. There is reason in this, for their attempts at poetry of action, as sketched in one of the chapters of Vigié Lecoq's *Crise poétique*, are utopian and dreamy in character, or softly and vaguely anarchical. But why have only the Symbolists been attacked? They are the representatives of the spirit of the "fin de siècle" on the European continent. They express this spirit more freely and more completely, and probably on account of the resemblance the public blames them more than others. The most humiliating faults are less concealed, their consequences are not avoided as in others, but they are none the less in the general current. In a recent book, *Le crime et le suicide passionnels*, Mr. Proal, the learned writer on criminal jurisprudence, says: "In the XVIIIth century collections were made of thoughts, maxims, and reflections. Pascal wrote his *Pensées*, La Rochefoucauld his *Maximes*, La Bruyère his *Caractères*, Vauvenargues his *Réflexions et Maximes*, Duclos his *Considérations sur les Mœurs*. To-day sensations are collected; meditations are no longer written. With the exception of Mr. Sully Prudhomme, who writes philosophic poems, thinkers are scarce among the poets. The books of literary criticism, of travel, and even of history, are now only books of impressions and sensations. There are books entitled *Idées et Sensations* by the brothers de Goncourt, *Sensations d'histoire* by Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Sensations d'Oxford* and *Sensations*

*d'Italie* by P. Bourget, and *Sensations de littérature et d'art* by Byvaneck. Mr. Jules Lemaitre, a critic with the gift of observation, and capable of following the traditions of the great moralists, yields to the fashion of the day in writing the *Impressions de Théâtre*. The part of the writer seems no longer to make men think, but to make them feel. Sensations are substituted for perceptions, pictures for ideas. Literature becomes painting, music, photography." Not only literature but all society is suffering of the evil of aboulia. The Symbolists are, after all, the products of these surroundings. "After impressionist literature," says Mr. Proal, "came impressionist painting, impressionist jury justice, and impressionist politics. *Les sensations d'un juré* have been written; one might write the *Sensations d'un député*. . . . France has become as impressionable and sensitive as a nervous woman." The fault of the Symbolists, then, is that of too faithfully reproducing the spirit of their times.

But it ought to be remarked that France is not, as is the too common belief, the only country to have created Symbolists. It is true the majority of them live in Paris; the difference in origin of these authors, however, shows plainly that the disease is general. Without counting the group of Belgians in Belgium, Verhaeren, Rodenbach, Morice, Lemonnier, Eckhoud, and at times Maeterlinck,—René Ghil, though living in France, is a Belgian, J. K. Huysmans a Hollander, Jean Moréas a Greek, Gustave Kahn a Semite, Fr. Viélé Griffin and Stuart Merrill are Americans, Charles Vignier and Mathias Morhard are Swiss, and Dumur is of Swiss and Italian extraction.

As for the future of Symbolism, it cannot expect to exert its influence very much longer. Indeed, owing to the extreme character of its manifestations, it is bound to be particularly ephemeral; for, the more intense the action, the sooner comes the reaction. In fact, the new generation is already here and has broken with the Symbolists in terms not to be mistaken in the two domains of life and of art. In literature the attack

has come from two sides simultaneously, from the school of Toulouse, whose members are called *les Toulousains*, and from a group of young writers at Paris called *Naturistes*.

It is easy to guess what they substitute for Symbolism. It is logical that since all had been done to withdraw from nature and what is normal, all must now be done to come back to it. Symbolism has reacted upon Naturalism, Naturalism must now react upon Symbolism. "C'est fini," exclaims the theorist of the new tendency, Maurice Leblond, "des expertes combinaisons sentimentales ou lexicographiques. L'Art de demain se distinguera surtout par l'absence presque totale de ces techniques prétentieuses et subtiles, et la pensée ne s'éperdra plus aux labyrinthes ombreux de la phraséologie contemporaine. L'on comprend que les prochaines réformes littéraires après toutes ces crises anormales et ces tentatives capricieuses aboutiront à un effet simpliste. Un retour aux ondes lustrales de la tradition s'impose et ces jeunes hommes le proclament qui, brisant l'étroite contrainte égoïste, abandonnent les chancelantes tours d'ivoire pour courir joyeux et craintifs vers l'étreinte tumultueuse et forte de la vie." These are pompous words to announce the advent of a new worship of nature, and the return to a literature which shall be more "simpliste." But the more or less unconscious meaning of this eloquence is the intention to return to a realism which shall be inspired not by the base and despicable side of nature, but by all that is healthy, strong, and poetic in it. Two other groups of poets have lately come up, who preach substantially the same gospel. The first call themselves *Les poètes de l'École française*, and have published in common *La foi nouvelle* (Sept., 1902), a book of verses containing sample productions of their lyre. The second, headed by Fernand Gregh, raised, early in 1903, the flag of a new Humanism.<sup>1</sup>

ALBERT SCHINZ.

<sup>1</sup> See a fair criticism of the new "Humanisme," in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 15 Janv. 1903, by Doumic.